

SUBJECT: Minister Heath's Comments August 27, 1951, on the National Intelligence Estimate regarding Probable Developments in Indochina - NIE-35

"The Embassy enclosed, for the Department's information, a memorandum prepared by the United States Minister to the Associated States, Mr. Donald Heath, containing his comments on the National Intelligence Estimate entitled: "Probable Developments in Indochina during the Remainder of 1951", published on August 7, 1951. This Estimate was shown to Minister Heath during his visit to Paris en route to Washington in connection with the visit to the United States of General de Lattre de Tassigny, French High Commissioner and Commander-in-Chief of the French Forces in the Far East.

David Bruce

Enclosure:

Memorandum prepared by
Minister Heath."

"MEMORANDUM

**COMMENTS OF MINISTER DONALD R. HEATH ON NIE-35:
"PROBABLE DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA
DURING THE REMAINDER OF 1951"**

I agree with the conclusions of the reference paper and particularly with the final estimate that direct Chinese Communist intervention in Indochina is unlikely to occur during the remainder of 1951. The possibility of early intervention, however, while unlikely during the next few months, should not be entirely ruled out.

Par. 5 of paper. I question the statement that French successes during the period since General de Lattre assumed command are in part due to "(c) the arrival of French reinforcements" or "(d) the inexperience at large-scale warfare of the Viet Minh guerrillas." As far as I am aware, no reinforcements of French Union forces have yet arrived from France, only replacements. Certainly this is the first time I have heard the statement that the operations undertaken by the Viet Minh guerrillas during the past ten months failed because of their inexperience in large-scale warfare. The Viet Minh attacks were shrewdly planned and energetically executed. De Lattre is of the opinion that the operation against Vinh-Yen was planned by European officers.

Review of this document by CIA has determined that
☒ CIA has no objection to declass
☐ If contains information of CIA interest that must remain
Classified at TS S G
Authority: HR 10-2
☐ It contains nothing of CIA interest
Date 2-10-81 Reviewer

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State Department review completed.

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State Department review completed

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I believe that the estimate that 10,000 Chinese personnel have been infiltrated into the Viet Minh is somewhat excessive. The French have no exact intelligence on this point but at a French staff briefing in June the number was placed as "in excess of 5,000."

Par. 6. The statements that the slowness of development of the Vietnamese Government is in part due to "(a) French reluctance to relinquish ultimate control of political and economic affairs" in Viet Nam, is not true today. Under de Lattre, intervention in internal political affairs has been limited, and the French cannot be said to be exercising ultimate control of economic affairs beyond the fact that they are heavily subsidizing the maintenance and equipment of the new Viet Nam national army, and supporting the exchange rate of the piaster.

Par. 8. Present plans call for the expansion of the Viet Nam army to 120,000 men, not to 100,000.

While in the past there have been differences of opinion between the Vietnamese Government and the French over control of the Viet Nam army, there is no such conflict at the present time.

Par. 9. The statement: "we are unable to determine whether the Viet Minh is actually losing any of its popular appeal" is surprising. I do not believe that any informed observer would deny that in the past twelve months there has been a very considerable decline in the popularity of the Viet Minh.

Par. 14. With regard to the estimate that 100,000 Chinese Communist troops could now be made available and logistically supported for invasion of Indochina, I believe that General de Lattre's estimate is that a maximum of 150,000 Chinese troops could be employed in the Tonkin area."

SECRET